

EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRUCTURES IN *LOLITA*

by Mark Scheid

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is a center-perspective novel: the world of the book exists as it is seen through Humbert Humbert's eyes. Humbert creates his world in two senses, for he is not only its observer, but its narrator as well. The novel, subtitled "The Confessions of a White Widowed Male," purports to be Humbert's autobiography. Humbert makes no secret of the fact that his epistemological approach is fictional: in addition to the deliberately falsified names of the characters (Humbert's own, for example [p. 280]),¹ there are constant reminders in the text that it is being fictionalized. Humbert sometimes stops his narration and addresses the reader before continuing his tale, even claiming at one point that his own existence depends upon the reader's awareness of the fiction: "Imagine me; I shall not exist unless you imagine me" (p. 119). Thus for Humbert, the main character as well as the putative author in *Lolita*, the task is first to understand the dialectic nature of his world, and then to attempt to mediate or resolve that dialectic in both his epistemological approach and his writing. The underlying dialectic theory of his mediation is stated in the article he has published in the *Cantrip Review*, where he

suggested among other things that seemed original and important to that splendid review's benevolent readers, a theory of perceptual time based on the circulation of the blood and conceptually depending (to fill up this nutshell) on the mind's being conscious not only of matter but also of its own self, thus creating a continuous spanning of two points (the storable future and the stored past). (P. 237)

Humbert's effort to reconcile these two points is a paradigm of artistic creation. Because Humbert is a writer, he is a professional mediator; his subject matter is *temps perdu* itself. Humbert's attempts to mediate the conflict between the past and the present turn on the dialectic of innocence and experience; initially, he is (in spite of his perversion) "innocent"—he is operating in the world under false assumptions, being tricked by Quilty without even knowing it. When in prison, he is experienced—he knows who tricked him, how and why. His account of his period of innocence is modified by his later knowledge; accordingly, he gives clues to Quilty's guilt throughout the novel, challenging the reader to guess his identity.

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In his attempt to mediate his past fictionally, Humbert is faced with another dialectic to resolve. His past can be recreated either through photography or through memory. The former is static and synchronic and gives an exact denotative reproduction of past reality. Memory is fluid and diachronic, constantly changing and altering perspective. It may fail to recapture accurately the exact events of the past, but it is reliable in respect to the connotation of the events—the feeling or impression they leave. This dichotomy marks the difference between Humbert's memory of Annabel and Lolita:

There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such general terms as: "honey-colored skin," "thin arms," "brown bobbed hair," "long lashes," "big bright mouth"); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see Lolita). (Pp. 13-14)

Humbert later claims to have a "photographic memory" which enables him to reproduce more or less verbatim the diary that Charlotte had destroyed (p. 40). The entire book is bracketed between his first critical article, which is concerned with Keats's relation to *A Remembrance of Things Past*, and his final article in the *Cantrip Review*, "Mimir and Memory" (p. 237). The incident that sets off the chain of ideas which leads Humbert to write the latter article combines the "memory theme" with the *Doppelgänger* motif, which will be discussed later. Humbert and Rita awake to find a "complete amnesiac" asleep on their hotel bed. The connection between Humbert and his amnesiac alter-ego is made explicit when the stranger is named, "tastelessly," according to Humbert, "Jack Humbertson" by the hospital staff.

Most of the remaining references to memory as a means of recalling the past also refer to memory's antithesis, a photographic record of past events. One of the first such passages, which links film to the *Doppelgänger* motif, occurs when Humbert and Lolita are on the couch: ". . . pity no film has recorded the curious pattern, the monogrammic linkage of our simultaneous or overlapping moves" (p. 55). Humbert's concern with photography is either with snapshots ("If I close my eyes I see but an immobilized fraction of her, a cinematographic still, a sudden smooth nether loveliness, as with one knee up under her tartan skirt she sits tying her shoe" [p. 43]), or with home movies ("That I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantments, immortalized in segments of celluloid, makes me moan today with frustration" [p. 212]).

Immediately following the Jack Humbertson episode, photography is used to strengthen the parallel between Humbert and the amnesiac. Humbert goes to the office of the *Briceland Gazette* to search for a picture of himself taken at "The Enchanted Hunters" in August, 1947. He discovers, however, while searching for his lost past five years later, that he had not in fact been

immortalized at all: "—and, ah, at last, a little figure in white, and Dr. Braddock in black, but whatever spectral shoulder was brushing against his ample form—nothing of myself could I make out" (p. 239). The dialectic which is made up of memory and photography is only part of a whole pattern of dialectic which Humbert uses in recreating his lost past.

Humbert's tendency to dialectize is, as we have seen, part of his need to mediate his experience, and is thus directed outward toward the narration of the novel. It is also, as we will see, a structural echo of the dialectical problem which lies at the base of his perversion and his epistemological solution. The narrative means which Humbert uses to describe the world around him can be divided loosely into two major related image patterns: mirrors and *Doppelgänger*s.

For Humbert the image in a mirror can be either misleading illusion or revealing truth. Illusion contributes at times to a "rich flavor of hell" in his "one-sided diminutive romances" (pp. 21-22). On the other hand, however, the mirror in *Lolita* serves as the source of ultimate reality; it is sometimes "the mirror you break your nose against" (p. 205). When Humbert is with Monique, the prostitute who reminds him of a nymphet, she sees "what I noticed too in the mirror reflecting our small Eden—the dreadful grimace of clenched-teeth tenderness that distorted my mouth . . ." (pp. 23-24). Much later in the novel, the mirror again serves as a means of revealing a reality which would not otherwise have been revealed, when Humbert sees Lolita's grimace of frustration and disappointment when he breaks a promise (p. 258).

More common, however, are the instances in which mirrors are used neither to reveal a hitherto unexpected aspect of reality nor to deceive. Nearly all of the remaining mirror images are thematically related to the Humbert-Lo love theme. This first occurs when Humbert meets Dolores: "All I know is that while the Haze woman and I went down the steps into the breathless garden, my knees were like reflections of knees in rippling water, and my lips were like sand . . ." (p. 39). The mirror occurs again when Humbert and Lo are alone for the first time in Charlotte's bedroom, and Humbert is removing a cinder from Lo's eye: "For a moment we were both in the same warm green bath of the mirror that reflected the top of a poplar with us in the sky" (p. 42). This scene foreshadows the mirror imagery which occurs in Room 342 of "The Enchanted Hunters":

There was a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror, a closet door with mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected bed there, the same in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two bedtables, a double bed; a big panel bed, to be exact, with a Tuscan rose chenille spread, and two frilled, pink-shaded nightlamps, left and right. (P. 110)

Finally, of course, there is the last mirror image in the book, which occurs after Humbert has killed Quilty and he chooses to drive on the "queer mirror side of the road." According to Andrew Field, "Humbert drives without

fear on the left-hand side of the road not, as some have thought, because he is 'beyond the law,' but because he has no more to fear from his sinister double."²

Our consideration of the mirror image thus leads directly into the consideration of the second prominent mirror theme in *Lolita*—the *Doppelgänger* motif. A number of minor variations on this theme run throughout the book. The number "342" on the Haze house in Ramsdale is the same as that of the room in "The Enchanted Hunters" Humbert and Lo share; it is the number of motels that Humbert says he has searched for clues to solve Lolita's disappearance (p. 226); and it is, perhaps, the basis for Quilty's constantly changing license numbers on the Aztec Red convertible.³ Other non-organic objects such as cars can have their doubles—the double of Humbert's blue Melmoth is sought by the police while Humbert and Lo are driving toward Briceland (p. 105); Quilty's convertible also has its double (p. 207).

Lolita herself has her *Doppelgänger* in addition to her obvious parallel to Annabel Leigh. Humbert's first wife dies in childbirth, just as Lolita will; in Wace, Lolita generates her own double in an attempt to trick Humbert, telling him that her momentary disappearance was caused when she "met a former girl friend," whose name is also "Dolly" (p. 205).

There are a few minor *Doppelgängers* related to Humbert. Gaston Godin's friend, Harold D. Doublename, recalls Humbert's own double name, as does that of the psychiatrist who writes the introduction to the book, John Ray, Jr. (JR, jr). Toward the end of the book, Humbert, who has often been compared to movie actors, glimpses a gesture on a drive-in screen which parallels the mission he is upon (p. 267).

But of course the most significant treatment of the *Doppelgänger* motif is that which connects Humbert and Quilty. Humbert is first compared to Quilty when he writes in his diary, ". . . I am said to resemble some crooner or actor chap on whom Lo has a crush" (p. 42). When Humbert describes, "in a flippant vein, the delightful little toothbrush mustache I had not quite decided to grow," Charlotte replies, "with a sidelong gleam of motherly mockery, directed at Lo . . . : 'Better don't, if somebody is not to go absolutely dotty'" (p. 46). The full meaning of Lo's reaction to Humbert's proposed mustache does not become clear until over one hundred fifty pages later, when it is first mentioned that Quilty has a "small dark mustache" (p. 199). Humbert himself does not notice any similarity between himself and the picture of Quilty above Lo's bed: "The resemblance was slight" (p. 65). The double motif is brought back, after a long absence, when Lolita's nurse, Mary Lore, is waylaid by Humbert who is trying to discover the identity of Lo's abductor: "'He is your brother,' she whispered at last" (p. 227). As Humbert nears Pavor Manor, on his way to kill Quilty, the *Doppelgänger* motif becomes more and more pronounced. Humbert practices his marks-

manship upon an old gray sweater, and later puts it on, bullet holes and all (pp. 243 and 256). When Humbert finally sees his enemy in his ancestral home, he notices another resemblance between Quilty and himself: "Gray-faced, baggy-eyed, fluffily disheveled in a scanty balding way, but still perfectly recognizable, he swept by me in a purple bathrobe, very like one I had" (p. 268). As Field points out, when Humbert finally confronts his foe, Quilty sets out to confuse the distinction between the two of them in Humbert's mind. His first question to Humbert is apparently obvious, but actually it functions as a subtle challenge of identity: "Now who are you?" (p. 269).⁴ When Humbert accuses him of having kidnapped Lolita, he denies it, and implies that it was Humbert, not he, who had made off with her: "'I did not!' he cried. 'You're all wet. I saved her from a beastly pervert. . . . I'm not responsible for the rapes of others. Absurd!'" (p. 271). When a sudden lunge by Quilty knocks the gun from Humbert's hand, the two are fused in the ensuing struggle: "I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us" (p. 272). Finally, Quilty, in an attempt to save his life, assumes that Humbert is exactly like himself, and can be bribed—Quilty offers his house, his playmates, and the royalties from his next play. But as Nabokov has said, "There are no 'real' doubles in my novels,"⁵ and Humbert cannot be bribed because, unlike Quilty, he was in love with Lolita, and intends to wreak retribution on the one who deprived him of her.

This narrative dialectic structure constitutes what may be considered the "world of the novel." It is simultaneously a depiction of the world Humbert lives in and his epistemological structuring of that world. It is within this world that Humbert's problem exists, and if a solution is to be found, it must take into account the dialectical nature of the world as Humbert sees it.

Throughout *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert is at odds with time. It is time which has inexorably swept onward after his childhood sweetheart, Annabel Leigh, suffered an untimely death, leaving him only with the desire for a physical relationship with pre-adolescent girls, but removing him each year further and further from the possibility of legally consummating his desire. Humbert has two alternatives: either he can render time powerless by suspending its effects, or he can attempt to rid himself of his passion. Throughout *Lolita* he attempts to resolve his dilemma using both solutions at once, and it is only at the end that he succeeds, curiously enough, with both.

Early in the book, Humbert tries a number of approaches to his problem, hoping each will end his misery. He seeks at first to rationalize his lust by demonstrating that the acts he seeks to perform were once acceptable:

Here are some brides of ten compelled to seat themselves on the fascinum, the virile ivory in the temples of classical scholarship. Marriage and cohabitation before the age of puberty are still not uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of

eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds. After all, Dante fell madly in love with Beatrice when she was nine, a sparkling girlie, painted and lovely . . . , and this was in 1274, in Florence. . . . (Pp. 20-21)

But again, his attempts fail because of space and time: if such acts are possible in contemporary society, it is only in remote locales; if they were acceptable in Europe, it was only in the distant past.

To mediate the discontinuity between his desires and society's laws, Humbert seeks an artificial synthesis of nymphet and adult woman. He first turns to Monique because she is a "delinquent nymphet shining through the matter-of-fact young whore." "Only a few years earlier," muses Humbert, "I might have seen her coming home from school!" (p. 24). But the synthesis is incomplete, as it is in most of his women, and he shies away from a lengthy relationship with her: "A cold I caught from her led me to cancel a fourth assignment, nor was I sorry to break an emotional series that threatened to burden me with heart-rending fantasies and peter out in dull disappointment" (p. 24).

Similarly, the hope of a successful synthesis in Valeria leads Humbert to marry her:

She looked fluffy and frolicsome, dressed *à la gamine*, showed a generous amount of smooth leg, knew how to stress the white of a bare instep by the black of a velvet slipper, and pouted, and dimpled, and romped, and dirndled, and shook her short curly blond hair in the cutest and tritest fashion imaginable. (P. 26)

Humbert soon discovers that he has been deceived, "and presently, instead of a pale little gutter girl, Humbert Humbert had on his hands a large, puffy, short-legged, big-breasted and practically brainless *baba*" (p. 27).

After his marriage to Charlotte, Humbert is able to "perform his nightly duty" only by imagining that his new wife is the synthesis he had longed for:

. . . at Lolita's age, Lotte had been as desirable a school girl as her daughter was, and as Lolita's daughter would be some day. I had my wife unearth . . . a thirty-year-old album, so that I might see how Lotte had looked as a child; and even though the light was wrong and the dresses graceless, I was able to make out a dim first version of Lolita's outline, legs, cheekbones, bobbed nose. Lottelita, Lolitchen. (P. 72)

Humbert even looks for nymphancy in Rita, a casual pick-up he meets after Lolita's desertion, and who serves primarily as a pal to him: "The oddly prepubescent curve of her back, her ricey skin, her slow languorous columbine kisses kept me from mischief" (p. 236).

Humbert's attempts at synthesis fail in all these cases, and it is not until the end of the novel that he is able to complete the fusion implicit in his time-space definition of nymphets:

Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as "nymphets."

It will be marked that I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see "nine" and "fourteen" as the boundaries—the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea. (P. 18)

Humbert fails in all the early attempts because he has not yet found a satisfactory epistemological approach to the world of the novel. Although he has discovered the key which will lead him to a complete synthesis of time and space, of desire and possibility, he takes the entire novel to turn it in the lock.

The epistemological key that Humbert discovers is to approach the world of the novel through games.⁶ As it must be to operate successfully in terms of the dialectical world of *Lolita*, the game approach is a synthesis of two dialectical opposites, each of which Humbert uses to overcome his problem, to mediate his temporal-spatial discontinuity. Humbert's "games" annihilate time because they furnish an opportunity for Humbert to participate in a child's activity. On the other hand, games also function in an adult sense as a stylized battle against an opponent, as in chess or tennis, thus allowing Humbert to use them in his efforts to defeat his perversion. In this sense the game is played initially by Humbert against himself (his full name is one indicator of his dual nature), but later against his alter-ego Quilty, the personification of his lust. Humbert's games are paralleled, as we will see later, by Humbert's (and Nabokov's) games with the reader, constructed through the use of parody, false foreshadowing and word games.

Early in the book, Humbert delineates the concept of youth-oriented games as part of his need to eradicate time by becoming a child's playmate and thus gaining access to her physically: "A shipwreck. An atoll. Alone with a drowned passenger's shivering child. Darling, this is only a game" (p. 21). A few lines later, Humbert writes his own solution to his time problem in the form of a prayer: "Ah, leave me alone in my pubescent park, in my mossy garden. Let them play around me forever. Never grow up" (p. 22).

Echoing this motif is the theme of sexual activity as a child's game. Just as Humbert "evoke[d] the child while caressing the mother" (p. 72) to make love to Charlotte, so he had earlier had his first wife, Valeria, wear, "before I touched her, a girl's plain nightshirt that I had managed to filch from the linen closet of an orphanage" (p. 27). Humbert and Annabel's initial essay into sex is echoed by Jean Farlow's account of seeing "two children, male and female, at sunset, right here, making love" (p. 83) on the shores of Hourglass Lake, and by Miss Pratt's concern over Lolita's apparent failure to develop any interest in "sex play" (p. 179). Prior to Humbert's success with Lolita at "The Enchanted Hunters," she had been (as he discovers later) making love to Charlie Holmes, the son of the director of Camp Q (pp. 126-127). Although overtones of the sex-as-childhood-game theme recur throughout the book (usually referring to Lolita by a nickname,

Dolly, which emphasizes her role as plaything, as in Quilty's "I had no fun with your Dolly. I am practically impotent, to tell the melancholy truth" [p. 271]), the definitive statement of the theme occurs, appropriately enough, when Humbert is first seduced by Lo:

Suffice it to say that not a trace of modesty did I perceive in this beautiful hardly formed young girl whom modern co-education, juvenile mores, the campfire racket and so forth had utterly and hopelessly depraved. She saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster's furtive world, unknown to adults. What adults did for purposes of procreation was no business of hers. (P. 123)

Accordingly, when Humbert is writing his "confession" in prison, he is acutely aware of her absence, and, after making an innocuous pun, cries "Oh, my Lolita. I have only words to play with!" (p. 32).

More important to the game theme is the concept of a game as an ordered campaign against an opponent. Implicit in an early account of Humbert's use of Lolita as plaything ("pity no film has recorded the curious pattern, the monogrammic linkage of our simultaneous or overlapping moves" [p. 55]), it is the epistemological approach which Humbert's mind seems naturally inclined to take. He cannot resist treating his psychotherapy as a contest between himself and the psychiatrist:

I discovered that there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make *them*, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake "primal scenes"; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's real sexual predicament. . . . The sport was so excellent, its results—in *my* case—so ruddy that I stayed on for a whole month after I was quite well. (P. 34)

When Humbert regards a window of the house he and Lo inhabit in Beardsley, his game-oriented mind puts its own stamp on it:

One of the latticed squares in a small cobwebby casement window at the turn of the staircase was glazed with ruby, and that raw wound among the unstained rectangles and its asymmetrical position—a knight's move from the top—always strangely disturbed me. (P. 175)

His fascination with chess is described both in his games with Valeria's father and with Gaston Godin, a French *émigré* who also teaches at Beardsley College. In the games with Godin the division between game and reality breaks down—in some cases for Humbert himself, in some cases for his opponent, who is one of Humbert's doubles in the book: Humbert describes the manner in which Gaston would pore over the chess board, oblivious to all noise, until the sound of Lolita's bare feet practicing dance steps in the living room would intrude—"only then did my pale, pompous, morose opponent rub his head or cheek as if confusing those distant thuds with the awful stabs of my formidable Queen" (p. 166). The identification of Lolita with queen recurs later in another game which foreshadows Quilty's "cap-

ture" of her (p. 185). Later, Humbert again refers to his games with Gaston, and this time they openly display his epistemological approach:

I suppose I am especially susceptible to the magic of games. In my chess sessions with Gaston, I saw the board as a square pool of limpid water with rare shells and stratagems rosily visible upon the smooth tessellated bottom, which to my confused adversary was all ooze and squid-cloud. (P. 213)

This observation is especially significant because it comes in the middle of one of Humbert's discourses on the other important game in *Lolita*, tennis. Unlike chess, which is exclusively opponent-oriented (and which therefore is the exclusive domain of adults in the book), tennis functions as another synthesis, since it may be both a form of juvenile game and a stylized battle, depending upon whether one "plays to win" or not.

Tennis played as a juvenile game is related to the sex-as-play theme. It is one of the topics discussed by young Humbert and Annabel at the Hotel Mirana (p. 14); Humbert cherishes a memory of Annabel on the tennis court (p. 148). Ironically, and somewhat more grotesquely, the parallel between juvenile sex and juvenile tennis is made even more explicit:

On especially tropical afternoons, in the sticky closeness of the siesta, I liked the cool feel of armchair leather against my massive nakedness as I held her in my lap. There she would be, a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper, as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe, a doll, the handle of a tennis racket, and was too indolent to remove. (P. 151)

Because *Lolita* is still a child, her approach to tennis is not the point-conscious one an adult would take. The report of *Lolita*'s progress in Beardsley School which Humbert receives from Miss Pratt informs us that "Dolly's tennis form is excellent to superb, even better than Linda Hall's, but concentration and point-accumulation are just 'poor to fair' " (p. 178). Later Humbert elaborates on *Lolita*'s tennis game, depicting her as always "rather vague about the score," engaging instead in a rhythmic recreation (pp. 211-212). Immediately following this description, Humbert relates the manner in which his still unidentified opponent outwits him in order to spend time playing tennis with *Lolita*. Later that same day Humbert meets his adversary again, in a scene which makes manifest the synthesis of the two definitions of the word "game":

In the middle of a trim turfed terrace I found her at last—she had run out before I was ready. Oh *Lolita*! There she was playing with a damned dog, not me. . . . there was an ecstasy, a madness about her frolics that was too much of a glad thing. . . . I put a gentle hand to my chest as I surveyed the situation. . . . One of the bathers had left the pool and, half-concealed by the peacock shade of trees, stood quite still, holding the ends of the towel around his neck and following *Lolita* with his amber eyes. . . . [He] noticed me from afar and working the towel on his nape walked back with false insouciance to the pool. And as if the sun had gone out of the game, Lo slackened and slowly got up ignoring the ball that the terrier placed before her. (Pp. 216-217)

The tableau presented here serves as a spatial rendering of the entire novel, with Quilty and Humbert face to face across a clearing while the prize the winner will carry home, Lolita, frolics between them.

Quilty starts playing his games with Humbert when he first meets him on the porch of "The Enchanted Hunters" in Briceland. Quilty (a nympholept like Humbert) has noticed Lolita and recognized her from his visits to his uncle, a neighbor of the Hazes in Ramsdale. When Humbert steps out for a breath of fresh air, Quilty, concealed by the dark, starts to quiz him in a manner which characterizes his approach throughout the entire book: he makes Humbert think he has been detected, and simultaneously think he must be imagining it, for logic tells him that it is nearly impossible.

"Where the devil did you get her?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: the weather is getting better."

"Seems so."

"Who's the lassie?"

"My daughter."

"You lie—she's not."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: July was hot. Where's her mother?"

"Dead." (P. 117)

Quilty does not encounter either Humbert or Lolita again until the two take up residence in Beardsley. Here, while directing the Beardsley School production of his play *The Enchanted Hunters* he meets Lolita and begins his affair with her. When Humbert and Lo leave Beardsley, Quilty follows them and continues to play upon Humbert's guilt until Humbert begins to mistrust his own sanity. At the same time that he is exploiting Humbert's guilt and playing upon his fears, Quilty is preparing for the second round of his game with Humbert. As he follows Humbert and Lo across the country he leaves a trail of clues for Humbert to find after Lolita and Quilty have tricked him and gotten away. When the "abduction" takes place according to plan at Elphinstone, Humbert begins to seek the identity of Lolita's lover, but again, Quilty is too good a player for him and Humbert is led on, encouraged and soundly defeated:

No detective could discover the clues Trapp had tuned to my mind and manner. I could not hope, of course, he would ever leave his correct name and address; but I did hope he might slip on the glaze of his own subtlety, by daring, say, to introduce a richer and more personal shot of color than was strictly necessary, or by revealing too much through a qualitative sum of quantitative parts which revealed too little. In one thing he succeeded: he succeeded in thoroughly enmeshing me and my thrashing anguish in his demoniacal game. With infinite skill, he swayed and staggered, and regained an impossible balance, always leaving me with the sportive hope—if I may use such a term in speaking of betrayal, fury, desolation, horror and hate—that he might give himself away next time. He never did—though coming damn close to it. (P. 227)

Defeated by Quilty again, Humbert must wait two years until Lolita writes him before he can discover the name of his adversary. When Humbert journeys to Parkington, where Quilty resides in Pavor Manor, the game theme occurs again; Humbert even thinks ironically of Quilty as his "play-mate" (p. 268).

When Humbert confronts Quilty their usual roles are reversed: Humbert knows who Quilty is, but Quilty does not yet recognize Humbert. Enjoying the situation, Humbert plays a few identity games with Quilty to even the score a little, then reminds Quilty of Lolita and asserts his own responsibility for her in a phrase which is both ironic and accurate: "She was my child, Quilty" (p. 270). Quilty immediately becomes aware that he is up against his old opponent, and responds to the fact that he is at a disadvantage and in danger of losing the game by pretending that no game is being played between himself and Humbert; following Humbert's statement about Lolita, Quilty implicitly denies that he and Humbert are opponents by asserting they are allies: " 'I'm very fond of children myself . . . and fathers are among my best friends' " (p. 270). For Humbert, Quilty's death will not be a successful conclusion to the game unless Quilty understands why he is being killed. Characteristically, Humbert is frustrated by Quilty's refusal to acknowledge that he is about to lose. As might be expected in a novel in which games are the key to epistemology, Humbert's attempts to force Quilty to recognize his role as opponent take the form of appeals to him to think, to experience, and to perceive:

"Quilty," I said. "I want you to concentrate. You are going to die in a moment. The hereafter for all we know may be an eternal state of excruciating insanity. . . . Concentrate. Try to understand what is happening to you." (P. 270)

In the final scene with Quilty, Humbert returns to the game motif. Humbert has Quilty read a poem containing a reference to tennis terminology, and as Field mentions, to chess terminology as well:⁷ "because you took advantage of my disadvantage . . ." (p. 273).

The novel's final synthesis is reached only after Quilty's death has made Humbert the winner of the game.

With a graceful movement I turned off the road, and after two or three big bounces, rode up a grassy slope, among surprised cows, and there I came to a gentle rocking stop. A kind of thoughtful Hegelian synthesis linking up two dead women. (P. 279)

The "two dead women" are Annabel and Charlotte, and the synthesis they form is Lolita, no longer quite nymphet. For the first time, however, it does not matter to Humbert that she could not be a nymphet all her life because he is in love with her as a person, not merely attracted to her as sex object. The dichotomy between Humbert's perversion and social acceptability has been mediated. But with that realization, Humbert understands that by winning he has lost, that by loving Lolita he has only made his self-recrimin-

ations more bitter. Parked on the grassy slope awaiting arrest, he returns to the game theme, now aware that he has made Lolita share his fate; he remembers stopping on a ridge not long after Lo's disappearance, and looking out over the valley:

I grew aware of a melodious unity of sounds rising like vapor from a small mining town that lay at my feet, in a fold of the valley. . . . And soon I realized that all these sounds were of one nature, that no other sounds but these came from the streets of the transparent town, with the women at home and the men away. Reader! What I heard was but the melody of children at play, nothing but that . . . —one could hear now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon, but it was all really too far for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets. I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord. (P. 280)

Because the world of the novel is dialectical and game-oriented, the reader must recreate Humbert's epistemological approach in order to understand it; Humbert continues his games with the reader by parodying in the course of the book a number of authors. Poe is touched on in obvious ways (Annabel Leigh, "Lenore") and in less obvious ways (Quilty's mansion, Pavor ["fear"] Manor, is a burlesque of the House of Usher).⁸ Innumerable nineteenth century authors from Conrad to Dostoyevsky to Poe, Stevenson, and E. T. A. Hoffman are alluded to in the mock double theme.⁹

The structure of the book also works to mislead the reader. Divided into two parts, the novel leads the seeker of erotic thrills on from page to page in the first part, building up to a climax when Humbert is seduced by Lolita—but at that point in the text, Humbert as narrator disappoints his prurient readers: "But really these are irrelevant matters; I am not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all. Anybody can imagine those elements of animality" (p. 123).

Lolita is also a parody of a murder mystery. The reader knows from almost the first page that the narrator is a murderer; whom will he kill? Nabokov plants several clues to seduce the careful reader to false conclusions. Humbert admits his brutality early in the book as he describes his treatment of Valeria, his first wife. When this is combined with his inability to govern Charlotte similarly and his simultaneous need to keep Lolita near him at all costs, the reader begins to suspect that he will act out his day-dreams. "The natural solution was to destroy Mrs. Humbert. But how?" (p. 79). The answer comes on a visit to Hourglass Lake—Humbert and Charlotte swim out toward the middle alone. "I knew that all I had to do was to drop back, take a deep breath, then grab her by the ankle and rapidly dive with my captive corpse." The time is right, opportunity and inclination coexist, the reader ready—"But what d'ye know, folks—I just could not make myself do it!" (p. 81).

Humbert also leads the reader to expect another murder: very early in the book the *Carmen* theme is introduced, and with it the possibility that Humbert will echo the plot of the opera and kill Lolita. After he gives us a brief taste of the lyrics of Lolita's favorite song, "Little Carmen," which ends "And the gun I killed you with, O my Carmen, / The gun I am holding now," Humbert adds parenthetically, "(Drew his .32 automatic, I guess, and put a bullet through his moll's eye)" (p. 59). Humbert continues to refer to the song and to his own .32 automatic throughout the book, and the references to the opera increase markedly just before Lolita is "kidnapped" from the hospital at Elphinstone (pp. 218 and 222). Immediately afterward Humbert starts off on his search, gun in pocket. When, after two years, he finds Lolita again, their dialogue is interspersed with lines from the last act of the opera as the scene builds up to a climax:

Carmencita, lui demandais-je . . . "One last word," I said in my horrible careful English, "are you quite, quite sure that . . . you will not come to live with me? . . ."

"No," she said smiling, "no."

"It would have made all the difference," said Humbert Humbert.

Then I pulled out my automatic—I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it. (P. 255)

This passage serves to illustrate the paradigmatic effect of Humbert's games with the reader. The novel's parodic structure, its false leads and misleading clues, make the reader aware that the world of the novel must be structured to be understood, but he finds that each structure he makes fails (as when he expects that Lolita or Charlotte will be murdered by Humbert).

The point of Humbert's authorial games is to force the reader to participate in the same epistemological structuring that Humbert himself created; it is a means of making the reader realize that he too shares an identity with psychopathic, perverted, tortured Humbert Humbert. Aware that his plea for the reader to "Imagine me. I shall not exist unless you imagine me" may not persuade, Humbert forces the reader to re-create him by structuring the world of the novel in such a way that the reader can understand it only by mirroring Humbert's own dialectical, game-oriented epistemology.

NOTES

1. This and all page numbers are from Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1966).
2. Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life In Art* (Boston, 1967), pp. 348-349.
3. Carl Proffer, *Keys to Lolita* (Bloomington, 1968), p. 19.
4. Field, *Nabokov*, p. 347.
5. Alfred Appel, Jr., "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov," in L. S. Dembo, ed., *Nabokov: The Man and His Work* (Madison, Wisc., 1967), p. 37.

6. For a discussion of games in *Lolita* see Alfred Appel, Jr., "Introduction" to Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita* (New York, 1970).
7. Field, *Nabokov*, p. 327.
8. See G. D. Josipovici, "Lolita: Parody and the Pursuit of Beauty," *Critical Quarterly*, 6 (1964), 35-48.
9. See Proffer, *Keys to Lolita*.